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Ex-CIA director says SALT aids U.S. spying

By Richard Whittle
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WASHINGTON — Former CIA Director William Colby said Wednesday that President Reagan would commission an important aid to collecting intelligence on Soviet nuclear forces if he abandoned the SALT II arms-control treaty.



William Colby

Voluntary U.S. and Soviet compliance with the unratified 1979 treaty, which set limits on each side's nuclear arsenal, has forced Moscow to reveal valuable information about the size and nature of its forces and to leave deployment and testing of them open to U.S. observation, Colby said.

"The fact is that they have gradually been forced into an exposure of their strategic weaponry to a degree which is really quite startling," said Colby, who was CIA director in the early 1970s. "Abandoning it means we are back to the dark shadow of Russian tradition, trying to find out what they are doing without any extra help."

Reagan tentatively decided in May to drop U.S. compliance because of Soviet violations of the pact.

Walter Slocombe, a former Pentagon official who worked on the treaty for the Carter administration, joined Colby at a news conference to argue that Reagan should continue to comply.

"We have to be very careful to guard against the desire to cut off our noses to spite our face," Slocombe said, stipulating that he agrees with the administration's finding that the Soviets have violated several of the treaty's provisions.

As a candidate, Reagan denounced the second Strategic Arms Limitation Talks accord, signed by former President Jimmy Carter but never ratified by the Senate. But Reagan agreed after taking office in 1981 not to undercut the pact's terms if the Soviets did the same.

The treaty required both sides to leave their long-range nuclear weapons exposed so each could verify, by satellite reconnaissance, the other side's compliance with limits on nuclear weapons launchers.

SALT II specifically forbids either side to interfere with the other's reconnaissance satellites or to hide missile silos or mobile missiles. But without the pact, Slocombe said, the Soviets "can begin putting covers on things. They can begin shifting around, deliberately trying to confuse us."

Critics have complained that, among other violations, the Soviets have failed to comply with a SALT II ban on encoding "telemetry," the radio signals sent by test missiles to report the rockets' performance. Colby and Slocombe argued that Soviet compliance with other provisions was more important.

If the Soviets were to ignore the treaty's other provisions on openness, Colby said, U.S. intelligence still would be able to monitor Soviet forces, but the task would be much more difficult and costly.

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